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RECENT THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE

THE NOTEBOOKS OF THE STUDENTS OF AN OLD BABYLONIAN "CATHEDRAL-SCHOOL"

In these days of public schools and state universities, when the parochial school is looked upon by many as an insidious attempt on the part of the church to encroach upon the domain of the state, it is becoming increasingly difficult for us to realize that state schools are a recent innovation and that during most of the centuries of the Christian era education has been almost exclusively in the hands of ecclesiastics. The parochial school is the lineal descendant of the bishops' schools and the monastic schools of mediaeval Europe. Only during the last few decades has it become a not unusual thing to find at the head of our colleges and universities men who are not D.D.'s. Having had his memory jogged as to matters of such recent date, my reader will be the better prepared for an introduction to the Temple School of Nippur as it flourished in its palmiest days in the third millennium B.C.

Through its excavations at Nippur the University of Pennsylvania came into possession of a large number of documents which were the work of the priest-professors and pupils of a school attached to one of the oldest temples in Babylonia. The reader will naturally jump to the conclusion that this school was the theological seminary where candidates for the priesthood received their training. But let me call his attention to a fact which will at once dispel this idea, but will also keep him from suspecting that the documents we are going to tell about must have come, not from a temple school, but from a business college. The Babylonian temple was not only the place of worship, but also the law-court and the largest, often the only, banking institution of the city in which it was located.

Recently Dr. Chiera published two parts of a volume on lists of personal names which were compiled by the teachers and pupils of the Temple School at Nippur.¹ In preparing these lists for publication,

¹ *Lists of Personal Names from the Temple School of Nippur.* By Edward Chiera. (Vol. XI of Publications of the Babylonian Section, the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania. No. 1, *A Syllabary of Personal Names.* No. 2, *Lists of Akkadian Personal Names.*) Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1916. 175 pages+70 plates.

Dr. Chiera had occasion to make a careful study of the school texts as a whole. As far as possible I shall give his results in his own words.

Besides the lists of personal names, there have come into the possession of the University Museum a very large number of lists of trees and wooden instruments, plants, stones, vessels, names of gods, officials, etc. All of these lists are Sumerian, and some of them contain also the Akkadian [Semitic] equivalent of the names; besides these lists, students copied models of legal documents, syllabaries [dictionaries], historical and grammatical texts, mathematical and metrological tablets, and much more of a miscellaneous character.

The school texts are divided by Dr. Chiera into four groups: (I) "The Typical School Exercises"; (II) "The Round Tablets"; (III) "The Model Texts"; (IV) "The Irregular Texts."

I. The typical school exercises were written on large, unbaked tablets.

In this group the obverse of the tablet is always divided into two columns, of which the first is the work of the teacher. The characters are large and beautifully formed. . . . Immediately opposite to this column, we have the work of the pupil, who, not as yet able to write without having a model immediately by the side, endeavors to reproduce as well as he can what has been written by the teacher in the first column. . . . In most of the tablets of this class this column has been either cut off, or has been so thoroughly erased, by pressing the stylus upwards and downwards on the writing, that all we can see of the pupil's work are a few wedges here and there. . . . The reverse of the tablet is always divided into four columns and inscribed by another pupil who, being more advanced, knows how to write without having the model immediately by the side. . . . His work, though still imperfect, both in accuracy and writing, is almost readable and, with the help of duplicates, would permit us to gather a more or less exact knowledge of the contents of the tablet; unfortunately, also in the case of the reverse, the pupils or their teachers have decided that their work was not worthy of being preserved, so that it was often destroyed, not through erasure, but by cutting off from the tablet as much as was possible, without destroying the teacher's model. . . .

II. On the obverse of the round tablets we generally find four lines of inscription, lines 1 and 3 the work of the teacher, lines 2 and 4 the work of the pupil. The work of the pupil is often almost as good as that of his teacher.

But the most striking characteristic of this group of tablets lies in the fact that we find here the nearest approach to a "palimpsest" to be discovered in the Babylonian and Assyrian literature. . . . In making the tablets, the soft clay was rolled into a ball, which was afterwards flattened against a level surface. On the flattened side the inscription was made. In some instances

the scribe, after having completed his exercise, instead of throwing it away, would use the clay for another tablet. He would roll it again into another ball, and flatten it a second time. The result was that the first inscription was not completely effaced and appeared again, in a more or less distorted form, either on the obverse or on the reverse of the new tablet. . . . The reverse is not inscribed.

III. Dr. Chiera includes in his "model texts"

those tablets from which even the teacher's models were copied. In other words, the original document which furnished the text for the school exercises. . . . These model texts, of which unfortunately we have not very many, are easily to be distinguished from the school exercises above discussed, because they always possess all of these special characteristics: (1) The tablets are well inscribed, with characters well spaced and uniform, since otherwise they could and would not be used as models. (2) They are always baked, being especially designated for continuous reference. (3) Each tablet deals with the same subject on both the obverse and the reverse. . . . (4) The tablets are generally large, having been made of the size required to contain the complete inscription.

IV. The irregular texts

depart from the other school texts and follow the accepted rules of tablet making. . . . In some instances they are shown to be exercises by the fact that they do not include the whole text, but only a portion of it; the pupil's work is also betrayed by the poor handwriting. . . . Some other school exercises are easily to be recognized as such, because they contain the same portion of text repeated over and over again.

Of the syllabary and lists of personal names, the class of these school texts which Dr. Chiera has published, he says:

Both the Syllabary and the lists represent the priestly effort to classify and bring into order the mass of different names which we find in existence in old Babylonian times. We may even go farther and suppose that such compositions as these may have been actually used as a guide in giving names to children, thus serving the purpose for which the calendar of saints of the Catholic Church is now employed.

For its scientific qualities Dr. Chiera's work merits high praise. It is marred at times by infelicities of diction. The proofreading might have been more carefully done.

Another volume of these school texts, just published,¹ is by Dr. Langdon, the new curator of the Babylonian Section of the University Museum. I should like to add here, parenthetically, that the Uni-

¹ *Sumerian Grammatical Texts*. By Stephen Langdon. (Vol. XII, No. 1, of Publications of the Babylonian Section, etc.) Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1917. 44 pages+72 plates.

versity Museum is to be congratulated on having procured the services of so energetic a scholar as Dr. Langdon. The volume includes the grammatical texts which had not already been published by Dr. Poebel. The more important texts are translated and discussed by the author in the introduction to the volume. It is therefore possible here also to let the author speak for himself.

Numbers 16 and 18 are particularly interesting and important, since they contain the Sumerian original of part of the standard Babylonian and Assyrian bilingual lexicographical work known as *ana itti-šu*. This series of lexicographical and grammatical textbooks seems to have been written by the Sumerian schoolmen to instruct the learner in business formulae, legal terms, and about words employed in practical life. The Semitic teachers then edited the series with a translation into their vernacular. The bilingual edition has been found in use in all parts of Babylonia and Assyria. . . . Number 17 reveals a Sumerian textbook which was known in later Babylonia and Assyria as *ġarra-ħubullu*, i.e., Sumerian *ġarra* means *ħubullu*, "money loaned at interest." This series was equally important, forming a huge text book on words connected with various sciences or crafts, such as geology, zoölogy, botany, the crafts of the carpenter, cabinet maker, etc.

Of interest is "the phonetic syllabary" aiming to reproduce each consonant with the three vowels *u-a-i*. One thinks of the *a-b ab* lessons, which initiated our grandparents into the mysteries of written language. I shall give only a few lines: *tu-ta-ti, nu-na-ni, bu-ba-bi, zu-za-zi, su-sa-si*, etc. A similar tablet published some years ago by Thureau-Dangin also introduced biconsonantal syllables like *dub-dab-dib, bur-bar-bir*, etc.

Dr. Langdon has done us a great service in putting these valuable texts into our hands. But when the reviewer came to his discussion of some of the texts, he began to wonder whether there was not a lot of truth in the opinion expressed so often these days that university professors lack plain common sense. Instead of putting down the number of the text as found on the autographed plates, Dr. Langdon uses the museum number. Those who use his volume are therefore compelled to look up an index of tablets to find out which of the texts is being discussed. Of what use or interest is the museum number 4506 to me when I am reading on page 9 Langdon's discussion of a text found in Plates 7 f. where it appears as number 7? This is the kind of thing one still finds and execrates in the books of some of the older German Assyriologists, but who would have thought that a younger scholar would have the audacity to perpetrate such an outrage upon his colleagues? Dr. Langdon, our time is worth something.

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